Several faculty running for Executive Council openings included in their campaign statement the need to resolve the “divide” between pre- and post- 1997 hires. Post 97 hires now outnumber pre-97 hires, so it is understandable this topic keeps surfacing and demanding attention.

But below the surface is a rumor that the disparity in retiree health benefits between these two groups is the fault of FA, that FA “gave up” these benefits. Future discussions on this subject will benefit from a review of the facts.

As written up time and time again in FA News articles from June 1992 through May 1997, FA was the only employee group who fought this issue in every available venue. In June 1992, the District negotiating team proposed an end to Retiree Medical Benefits for new hires as of July 1, 1993. FA and the District entered into an MOU in March of 1993 stating that both sides would evidence good faith efforts to resolve this issue but in the event that the parties were unable to reach agreement by July 1, 1994, the issue would be forwarded to PERB (Public Employment Relations Board). In 1994, the classified and management groups agreed to give up retiree benefits for their future employees. In September of 1994, the District and FA declared impasse and filed with PERB.

FA and the District spent the next three years tied up in legal wrangling, first in mediation and later in Fact Finding. Fact Finding provided a legal arena for FA and the District to present facts to an Administrative Law Judge (ALJ), who reviewed them and handed down a non-binding recommendation. This long legal battle cost the Association (the faculty) over $50K, more like $100K in today’s dollars, and thousands of hours in FA staff time and energy. The ALJ did not let the District completely ignore its obligation to provide some type of retiree medical benefit to new hires and recommended the District provide some kind of bridge program to Medicare for new employees. This recommendation was very disappointing to FA, but a bridge program was better than no retiree medical benefits program or the one-time District contribution of $500 to all new hires proposed by the District. Additionally, the District wanted to apply the new retiree health benefit bridge program retroactively to all faculty hired after 1994, when the legal proceedings began, while FA wanted this group grandparented into the existing plan. On this point, FA prevailed and the 39 faculty hired between 1994 and 1997 became eligible for the existing benefits plan. FA is currently working on and will continue to pursue health benefit options for post-1997 hires.